

PS 2305
Federal Government
Fall 2025

Instructor: Coy Matlock

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Office Hours: Tuesday & Thursday 12PM-4PM, or by appointment

Course Description

This course is designed to introduce students to the basic concepts of the U.S. federal government. This involves understanding the fundamental principles of American government, the basic institutions that comprise American government, and the political participation of the American people. In addition, we will examine the quantity and quality of American civil participation and how our political system and public opinion have changed.

Course Learning Outcomes

On successful completion of this course, you will be able to:

- Describe some of the most well-known political philosophers and their teachings.
- Summarize what is included in the Constitution.
- List and articulate your views on the big questions and great issues of government.
- Explain and critically assess the formal and informal political institutions and their respective roles in American politics.
- Summarize and explain several key Supreme Court rulings in our nation's history.
- Assess the causes and consequences of different forms of political participation, and outline the ways in which individuals and groups can affect political outcomes in the United States.
- Critically analyze information to discern its meaning and validity.
- Explain how government impacts your daily life.

2025-2026 Core Assessment

- **Critical Thinking**
Students will develop critical thinking skills to include creative thinking, innovation, inquiry, and analysis, evaluation, and synthesis of information.
- **Communication**
Students will develop communication skills to include effective development, interpretation, and expression of ideas through written, oral, and visual communication.

<p>Program Learning Outcomes (Political Science): The graduating student will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SLO 1: Domestic Processes and Concepts: Students will understand key political processes, institutions, and concepts within the United States. • SLO 2: International and Global Processes: Students will develop an awareness of international relations, global issues, and the influence of global organizations on national politics. • SLO 3: Applied Government Experience: Students will gain practical experience working in government settings, applying political science knowledge to real-world policy and decision-making processes. 	<p>Marketable Skills for Political Science:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students can effectively communicate ideas and information verbally, visually, and in writing. • Students can distinguish between credible/relevant information and information lacking credibility/relevance. • Students can identify critical and common institutions of political decision-making and policy-making across different nation-state settings. • Students can engage with social and political problems and use critical thinking to develop logical solutions.
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Texas Domain III Competency 003 (Geography & Culture)

The teacher understands and applies knowledge of geographic relationships involving people, place, and environments in Texas, the United States, and the world: the teacher also understands and applies knowledge of cultural development, adaptation, diversity, and interactions among science, technology, and society.

Texas Domain III Competency 004 (Economics)

The teacher understands and applies knowledge of economic systems and how people organize economic systems to produce, distribute, and consume goods and services.

Texas Domain III Competency 005 (Government & Citizenship)

The teacher understands and applies knowledge of concepts of government, democracy, and citizenship, including ways that individuals and groups achieve their goals through political systems.

Assignments and Grading

Homework Assignments (30% of your grade, 10% for each of the 3 assignments):

Students are required to complete three homework assignments. Assignments may include short essays on topics learned in the course, concept clarification, and your response to a particular issue. A student who does not turn in an assignment on time will receive a zero for the assignment.

Exams (70% of your grade):

There will be three exams for the course. Exams will include multiple choice questions as well as short essays on topics covered in the course. The first test is worth 20% of your final grade, the second test is worth of 20% of your final grade, and the final exam is worth of 30% of your final grade. Each exam will be available for students to take after topics are covered.

Extra Credit Opportunities:

A number (to be determined by the instructor) of extra credit opportunities, such as unannounced quizzes and papers, will be given occasionally. The earned score will be added to your grade as extra points.

Grade Scale

$\text{Your Points} = HW1 \times 0.1 + HW2 \times .01 + HW3 \times 0.1 + \text{First Test} \times 0.2 + \text{Second Test} \times 0.2 + \text{Final Exam} \times 0.3 + \text{Your total earned extra points}.$

Your letter grade will be determined based on the following grading scale:

Points	Letter Grade
100- 90.0	A
89.9-80.0	B
79.9-70.0	C
69.9-60.0	D
59.9 or less	F

Assigned Reading

The required text for this course is:

Christine Barbour and Gerald C. Wright. 2016. *Keeping the Republic: Power and Citizenship in American Politics, 8th Edition*. ISBN: 9781506362182

Students are expected to have read the assigned chapters before coming to class. Should class need to be canceled due to illness or other unforeseen circumstances, the material scheduled for the missed class will be covered the next time the class meets. All additional readings will be posted.

Attendance and Participation

It is students' decision to attend college, and students are responsible for their college education. As this is a college-level course, I do not take attendance, but I expect students to attend all class meetings. Also, I will occasionally give pop quizzes as extra points, so coming to class regularly will improve your chances of being successful in this course.

Classroom Rules

All students must treat the instructor, the other students, and the classroom setting with respect. Please come to class on time, stay for the entire class, turn off cell phones during class, and refrain from potentially disruptive activities such as talking with friends or passing notes. These policies are put in place to facilitate a learning environment in the classroom that allows all students to focus on the lecture and class discussion. It is also important to show respect for alternative opinions and points of view during class discussions. Thus, you should listen when either the instructor or a fellow student is speaking to the class, and refrain from using insulting language and gestures, no matter how vehemently you may disagree with your classmates. Please note that I reserve the right to stop discussion at any time.

Tentative Course Schedule

Below is a tentative schedule of topics and reading assignments for the course. Thus, items on this syllabus are subject to change per the discretion of the instructor. If I deem it necessary to make changes and/or modifications in the schedule, I will make an announcement in class.

A. The Fundamental Principles of U.S. Government: Our objective will be to review the agreements, principles, and basic institutions that comprise American Government.

Week 1 (08/25): Course Guidelines and Expectations

- Chapter 1
- Introduce Yourself to Me Assignment (due by 11:59pm on 08/30)
- Syllabus Quiz (due by 11:59pm on 08/30)

Week 2 (08/31): American Political Culture

- Chapter 2
- Labor Day (no class Monday 09/01)

Week 3 (09/07): The Principles of American Politics

- Chapter 3

Week 4 (09/14): Federalism in the United States

- Chapter 4
- Extra Credit 1 (due by 11:59pm on 09/20)

Week 5 (09/21): **First Exam Week**

- Homework Assignment 1 (due by 11:59pm on 09/27)
- First Exam (due by 11:59pm on 09/27)

B. To Participate or Not to Participate: Our objective will be to examine the degree to which Americans participate in politics and the ways in which they do.

Week 6 (09/28): Civil Rights and Civil Liberties

- Chapter 5 & Chapter 6

Week 7 (10/05): Political Socialization, Participation, and Public Opinion

- Chapter 11

Week 8 (10/12): How to Measure Public Opinion

- Chapter 11

Week 9 (10/19): Political Parties

- Chapter 12

Week 10 (10/26): Second Exam Week

- Homework Assignment 2 (due by 11:59pm on 11/01)
- Second Exam (due by 11:59pm on 11/01)

C. The Fundamental Institutions of U.S. Government: Our objective will be to examine the structure and functions of the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of the U.S. government. In addition, we will review that comprises civil liberties in the United States.

Week 11 (11/02): Interest Groups and Movements

- Chapter 13

Week 12 (11/09): Voting and Elections in the United States

- Chapter 14
- Extra credit paper (due by 11:59pm on 11/15)

Week 13 (11/16): The U.S Congress

- Chapter 7

Week 14 (11/23): Thanksgiving Break

- No class meetings

Week 15 (11/30): The Presidency and The Federal Executive

- Chapter 8 & Chapter 9
- Homework Assignment 3 (due by 11:59pm on 12/06)

Week 16 (12/07): The Judiciary

- Chapter 10
- **Final Exam (due by 11:59pm on 12/10)**

Other Course Policies & Resources
Academic Integrity

Intellectual development requires hard work. Students in this class are expected to demonstrate scholarly behavior and academic honesty in the use of intellectual property. A scholar is expected to be punctual, prepared, and focused; meaningful and pertinent participation is appreciated. Examples of academic dishonesty include but are not limited to: Turning in work as original that was used in whole or part for another course and/or professor; turning in another person's work as one's own; copying from professional works or internet sites without citation; collaborating on a course assignment, examination, or quiz when collaboration is forbidden.

The policy can be found at: <https://www.sulross.edu/about/administration/university-policies/>. In addition, please note that plagiarism detection software will be used in this class for written assignments.

Course Blackboard Resources

There are several resources on the course Blackboard page. You are expected to review and familiarize yourself with the items in Blackboard in the first week of class.

Blackboard Technical Support

SRSU 24/7 Blackboard Technical Support Online Support Desk Contact Info:
Toll Free: 888.837.6055. Email: blackboardsupport@sulross.edu

SUSR Library Services

The Bryan Wildenthal Memorial Library in Alpine offers FREE resources and services to the entire SRSU community. Access and borrow books, articles, and more by visiting the library's website, library.sulross.edu. Off-campus access requires logging in with your LobolD and password. Librarians are a tremendous resource for your coursework and can be reached in person, by email (srsulibrary@sulross.edu), or phone (432-837- 8123).

The Southwest Texas Junior College (SWTJC) Libraries at Uvalde, Del Rio, and Eagle Pass offer additional access to library spaces and resources. Del Rio, Eagle Pass, and Uvalde students may also use online resources available through SWTJC website, library.swtjc.edu. The SWTJC Libraries serve as pick-up locations for Inter Library Loan (ILL) and Document Delivery from the Alpine campus.

SRSU Distance Education Statement

Students enrolled in distance education courses have equal access to the university's academic support services, such as library resources, online databases, and instructional technology support. For more information about accessing these resources, visit the SRSU website. Students should correspond using Sul Ross email accounts and submit online assignments through Blackboard, which requires secure login. Students enrolled in distance education courses at Sul Ross are expected to adhere to all policies pertaining to academic honesty and appropriate student conduct, as described in the student handbook. Students in web-based courses must maintain appropriate equipment and software, according to the needs and requirements of the course, as outlined on the SRSU website. Directions for filing a student complaint are located in the student handbook.

ADA Statement

SRSU Disability Services. Sul Ross State University (SRSU) is committed to equal access in compliance with Americans with Disabilities Act of 1973. It is SRSU policy to provide reasonable accommodations to students with documented disabilities. It is the student's responsibility to

initiate a request each semester for each class. Students seeking accessibility/accommodations services must contact Rebecca Greathouse Wren, LPC-S, SRSU's Accessibility Services Coordinator at 432-837-8203 (please leave a message and we'll get back to you as soon as we can during working hours), or email rebecca.wren@sulross.edu. Our office is located on the first floor of Ferguson Hall (Suite 112), and our mailing address is P.O. Box C-122, Sul Ross State University, Alpine, Texas, 79832.

Classroom Climate of Respect

This class will foster free expression, critical investigation, and the open discussion of ideas. This means that all of us must help create and sustain an atmosphere of tolerance, civility, and respect for the viewpoints of others. Similarly, we must all learn how to probe, oppose and disagree without resorting to tactics of intimidation, harassment, or personal attack. No one is entitled to harass, belittle, or discriminate against another on the basis of race, religion, ethnicity, age, gender, national origin, or sexual preference. Still, we will not be silenced by the difficulty of fruitfully discussing politically sensitive issues.

Commitment to Diversity

I aim to create a learning environment for my students that supports a diversity of thoughts, perspectives and experiences, and honors your identities (including race, gender, class, sexuality, religion, ability, socioeconomic class, age, nationality, etc.). I also understand that the crisis of COVID, economic disparity, and health concerns, or even unexpected life events could impact the conditions necessary for you to succeed. My commitment is to be there for you and help you meet the learning objectives of this course. I do this to demonstrate my commitment to you and to the mission of Sul Ross State University to create an inclusive environment and care for the whole student as part of the Sul Ross Familia. If you feel like your performance in the class is being impacted by your experiences outside of class, please don't hesitate to come and talk with me. I want to be a resource for you.